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Aims and Methods in the School

THE Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art is, as its name implies, devoted to two distinct but closely allied branches of education; the collecting and exhibiting of works of art: the teaching of the theories which underlie artistic production, and the practical application of those principles to the works to which we commonly give the name "Industrial."

It is difficult to find a name by which we may classify the products (in line, form and color) of man's creative power which are neither paintings nor sculpture. Where does "decorative painting"—the enriching of a wall, for instance, with geometric or floral forms, to the exclusion of the human figure—end, and "painting," in the generally accepted sense, begin? We speak of the "carving" about a doorway and mention as "sculpture" the figures of Michelangelo or of the school of Pheidias: where lies the line of division? In truth, there is none; the same fundamental principles govern all—it is in only comparatively modern times that dividing lines have been drawn, to the loss of both the "Major" and the "Minor" arts.

If we classify as "works of minor art" the windows of Chartres, the ceramics of the Nearer Orient, or the fabrics of the fifteenth century Italian looms, are we not suggesting that they are of less æsthetic value than even secondary paintings or pieces of sculpture which are, nevertheless, listed as "works of art?" Yet many a majolica platter, many an Indian embroidery has greater beauty than the products placed in the higher category. "Minor art" is a misleading term.

Fault may be found, on the other hand, with a title such as "The Useful Arts" by which to distinguish the products of the cabinet-maker, the potter or the silversmith—for are not paintings and statues also useful? We may not "use" them in the ordinary sense—they nevertheless serve the spiritual needs of man quite as much as those needs are served by making beautiful the articles of daily use.

The term "Industrial Art" will, perhaps, do as well as any when we wish to designate the multitudinous objects which serve our daily needs, but which have been raised into the realm of the arts by the creative power of the designer—although even this term has its drawbacks. It seems to place the objects so designated in a class apart from and below "works of art," whereas, although they may be less emotionally moving than the great paintings or the great pieces of sculpture, they are (or may be) equal from the æsthetic point of view.

Whatever the name, it is of the utmost importance that these objects be of the highest artistic value; for they play so large a part in our daily lives that to have them commonplace or ugly means a general lowering of our standards of taste. Their influence makes itself felt hour by hour: in our clothing, our furniture, our china and glass and silverware, in our books and magazines. It might fairly be

claimed that upon a widespread distribution of beautiful objects of daily use depends the future artistic standing of the country.

The work done in a School of Industrial Art must, therefore, appeal to all who have the artistic welfare of the people at heart. They should see to it that such a place of training is given adequate support; and may demand of it the highest standards of thoroughness and efficiency.

In the training of the students in a School of Industrial Art three things are necessary: technique, theory and taste—and of these three, taste is the greatest. For a designer may be a skilled technician: he may know the theories which should guide him, but if he have not taste his skill and his knowledge count for little.

Yet to train the taste is no easy matter. Difficult questions immediately arise: "What is taste?" "Whose taste—yours or mine or the other fellow's?" "Personal taste or collective taste?"

Such training must, in the final analysis, be personal, yet scrupulous care should be taken that the student be left free to form his own taste. The teacher must give, in so far as he can, the reasons which govern him in his choice, but should not impose his conclusions: it should be "This is how it seems to me"—not "Thus it must seem to you." Searching analysis of line and form and color; continual comparison of the old and the new—of the generally accepted and the scarcely tolerated—of the obvious and the obscure; in such manner only—mere gropings among things quite indefinable—may training in taste be given; a training in the highest degree important and yet in equal degree difficult to give.

The teaching of theory is a simpler matter—the "why" can be based on clear reasoning. A knowledge of materials and their limitations; the relation of material to form and the proper adjustment of the interdependent structure and ornament: these can more easily be taught.

Paralleling the training in theory is the closely related technical training—the "how" in the trilogy of taste, theory and technique. This is the simplest, the most obvious branch of the work, and, because it is easy to grasp, often too greatly emphasized. The student enjoys the acquiring of technical skill; the public bestows upon it its warmest appreciation. The duty of the School is to see that while the training in technique is thorough in every way, the more important training in understanding and appreciation is made the predominant interest.

The amount of technical training needed varies greatly in the different crafts. The student who would become a successful producer of pottery, for instance, requires but clay and glazes, a wheel and a kiln, and although he may profitably spend years in experimentation, the technical details of his craft are not hard to learn. The successful designer of figured fabrics, on the other hand, must, in his student days, be furnished with complicated machinery, and expend much time in arduous, definite study. He cannot be a successful designer until

he knows the limitations of his material and his machines and can carry the sketch made upon paper through the intricate processes which lead to the completed fabric.

The School does not attempt to teach architecture, sculpture or painting, but strives to meet every demand made for training in the decorative arts. (Here again one is tempted into definitions, asking, why the "decorative arts?" Architecture, in the proper meaning of the word, is decorative: and if paintings and sculpture are not for decorative purposes, for what purpose do they exist? Perchance to fill Museums?)

Subjects allied to architecture are taught. Inferior decorations, furniture design and making, modeling, wood-carving and wrought-metal work, mosaic and pottery—subjects intimately connected with the work of the architect, and which require a certain amount of training along architectural lines, as well as the solving of the specific problems of the individual craft. The work in modeling does not differ in kind from the training given the sculptor—only in degree; it is not carried quite so far.

The training given in our School is, again, similar to that given the painters in our Schools of Fine Art, as far as the preliminary training is concerned: the study of anatomy and drawing from the cast, which leads to drawing from life. Our training is, however, broader in scope, including mechanical drawing, line drawing and work in water-color as well as oil. A thorough grounding is given all who enter. Those students who wish to specialize in illustration, for instance, are required, in the first year, to take the same training as those who wish to become costume designers or teachers: in the later years only does differentiation begin. The theories of design and color are presented and the students are required to attend illustrated lectures giving a general survey of the arts.

As Philadelphia is one of the largest centres of the textile industry, it is gratifying that our School should lead the country in this important branch of artistic training: its achievements are known wherever textiles are made. The training given is most thorough, comprising every branch of the art. It is not generally realized, for instance, that this is the only School in the country where the weaving of silk, with all the special training which that implies, is taught.

The School has, in the past, held to a high standard. It is the determined intention of all who guide its policy and who teach its classes that it shall ever move forward in its endeavor to raise its standards and to play its part as one of the important factors in the development of the taste of the nation.

H. E.